



AMBASSADOR LEWIS A. LUKENS

REMARKS

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE TO FGC

FEBRUARY 16, 2012

5 PM – 8 PM

(As prepared)

Bonjour, et bienvenue.

Aujourd'hui j'ai l'honneur d'écouter avec vous la discussion d'un panel d'experts distingué. Le groupe serait accueilli par la Secrétaire d'Etat des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, Madame Hillary Rodham Clinton, et vous reconnaitrez certainement Mme Molly Melching de Tostan et Mme Nafissatou Diop du UNFPA et UNICEF. La discussion sera modérée par Melanne Verveer, Ambassadeur américaine pour la femme.

Nous devons tous féliciter ce panel pour leurs efforts assidus à combattre la pratique criminelle d'excision génitale féminine.

Comme le panel se trouve à Washington avec un public anglophone, le programme se déroulera entièrement en anglais. Alors, je fais la transition...du français...à l'anglais...

- USG stands together with people worldwide and here in **Senegal** to observe the ninth annual International Zero Tolerance Day to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). (Molly Melching says that “mutilation” sends the wrong message, so I propose you use Female Genital Cutting throughout.)

- 100-140 million women (est) worldwide and 90 million girls (est) 10 years old and over (in **Africa**) have undergone FGC.
- In **Senegal**, 28% of overall female population has undergone FGC, *but in Kolda and Tambacounda, that rate is as high as 92%.*
- FGC causes intense pain and psychological trauma.
- It has severe short and long-term health risks.
- FGC has *extremely* negative consequences on health and the overall well-being of women and girls the world over.
- It violates a woman's rights and dignity.
- Some still defend it as part of a *cultural* or *religious* tradition. As U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has reiterated, violence toward women and girls cannot be cultural. FGC is *not* sanctioned by Islam, Christianity, or any of the world's major religions.
- FGC is mostly performed on girls in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
- However, the procedure also takes place in some immigrant communities ***in the U.S.*** USG works to sensitize practitioners in health and legal communities about the negative consequences of FGC.
- Around the world, community-based approaches involving all members of society are proving to be the only lasting solutions.
- When men – often fathers – come to understand the physical and psychological trauma of FGC, they often become the most effective activists for its eradication.
- Communities worldwide must continue to act collectively to abandon the practice.
- The USG is **proud** to support women and men around the world who denounce this egregious practice and seek to make it a thing of the past.

- It is exciting to see communities here in **Senegal** standing up together against FGC; overturning deeply entrenched social norms that harm not only women and girls, but whole communities.
- Tostan is perhaps the brightest star worldwide in the work toward eradicating FGC. Over time, Molly and her team have developed an approach of partnering with communities to implement an empowering, human rights-based education program. After participating in this program, more than *5,000 communities have publicly abandoned FGC*.
- Senegal is on track to *completely abandon FGC by 2015*.
- This is real, solid development through international cooperation. Thank you Molly, Tostan, Nafissatou, and all the other champions of women's rights who are leading this fight. Your persistence and hard work are paying off.
- Following remarks in Washington [by Secretary Clinton and Congressman Crowley](#), each participating country will be given the opportunity to ask one question of the panel. Senegal's question has [been prepared after discussion with several of you before tonight's event](#), and one of the Public Affairs staff will transmit it to Washington for a live answer.
- Thank you *very much* for your presence here this evening.